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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the developmental nature of organizational communication competence, this literature review draws on the communication competence and organizational assimilation literatures to propose models of the process of developing organizational communication competence. The paper's first section presents an overview of research exploring interpersonal communication competence, followed by a more extensive review of the literature on organizational communication competence. The second section reviews literature on assimilation processes as it relates to communication competence. Finally, the third section examines the process of developing communication competence during assimilation. The paper suggests that the construct of organizational communication must be viewed as multidimensional and dynamic; hence, the proposed models focus on the development of organizational communication competence rather than assuming all organizational members naturally possess appropriate levels of communication knowledge, skill, and motivation to engage in effective workplace interaction. Ninety-six references are attached. (SR)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE DURING ORGANIZATIONAL ASSIMILATION

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Introduction

Since many believe that effective communication leads to higher levels of productivity and morale, both organizational communication scholars and practitioners have sought to determine the causes and consequences of competent interaction among organizational members. In particular, researchers have sought to discover how individual communication abilities or competencies influence various outcomes in organizational contexts. Although communication competence has been a frequent topic of study for organizational communication scholars, it seems that past conceptual definitions of organizational communication competence have been fairly simple and unidimensional in nature. For example, researchers have focused on competence as either communication knowledge, communication skills, or interaction outcomes (e.g., effectiveness). In brief, they have not examined organizational communication competence as a multidimensional construct or considered the interrelationships among its component dimensions.

In addition, since the majority of studies have employed cross-sectional research designs, almost no research has explored how organizational members become communicatively competent; thus, our knowledge of the dynamic processes associated with how one develops communication knowledge and skills during role transitions in organizations is limited. These shortcomings in the research on competence serve as the impetus for this review which represents an initial attempt to map the development of organizational communication competence.

In order to study the development of communication competence, organizational assimilation processes provide an appropriate context, since during this period newcomers typically learn and develop role-related knowledge and behavior. More specifically, during assimilation processes, newcomers: 1) learn expected role behaviors (Van Maanen, 1975; Schein, 1971; Jablin & Krone, 1987); 2) make sense of organizational events (Louis, 1980); and, 3) develop their situational identity (Katz, 1980; Wanous, 1980). Feldman (1983) stresses the significance of the assimilation process by arguing that newcomers' assimilation experiences often dictate how they will perform during their tenure in the organization. Thus, the ways in which individuals learn and develop their communication abilities during the assimilation process seem important for understanding the overall development of organizational members' communication competence during their stay in organizations.

Since this review focuses on the developmental nature of organizational communication competence, the process proposed in this paper focuses on new organizational members as they pass through the first phases of assimilation to assess how various factors relate to the development of competence. More specifically, the first section of this paper presents an overview of research exploring interpersonal communication competence, followed by a more extensive review of the literature on organizational communication competence. Subsequently, literature on assimilation processes is reviewed as it relates to communication competence. Finally, the third section examines the process of developing communication competence during assimilation.

Communication Competence

While this paper focuses on organizational communication competence, much of the recent research on communication competence has been conducted by interpersonal communication scholars. Briefly, communication competence in interpersonal literature has been defined as control (Parks, 1985), interaction management (Weimann, 1977), effectiveness (Bochner & Kelly, 1974), interaction involvement (Cegala, 1981; Cegala, Savage, Brunner & Conrad, 1982), and communication abilities (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Moreover, previous reviews and assessments of the state of interpersonal communication competence research suggest that communication competence includes three general components: cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor (McCroskey, 1982; Duran, 1989; Cegala, 1981; Duran & Kelly, 1984; Rubin & Henzl, 1984).

Spitzberg (1983) and Spitzberg & Cupach (1984), for instance, suggest that communication competence includes knowledge, skill, and motivation dimensions. First, the cognitive component represents knowledge of the appropriateness of communication rules within an interpersonal system. It is demonstrated by the range of an individual's "behavior and contextual repertoire and accurate comprehension of the rules relating these behaviors and contexts" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 66). Second, the psycho-motor, or skills, component is concerned with the performance aspect of communication. Performance includes encoding and decoding skills which individuals use during interaction. Third, the motivation dimension suggests that communication competence is influenced by values, including evaluations and attributions of competence by interactants. In addition, motivation can be viewed as an individual's desire to learn the norms of a system and develop the capabilities to act effectively within that system. This type of motivation to achieve competence can result from an inherent drive to master the environment (e.g., White, 1959) and/or perceived benefits for demonstrating competent behavior. From this general definition,

communication competence can be conceptualized as: a) knowledge of behavioral norms and contextual constraints, b) a repertoire of communication skills, c) a desire by individuals to be competent.

While interpersonal scholars generally agree on the dimensions of communication competence, they tend to disagree on the locus of communication competence in the communication process. In a review of the communication competence literature, Duran (1989) summarizes the conceptual approaches and suggests that most communication competence researchers use either dispositional or situational approaches (cf. Cupach & Spitzberg, 1981). Dispositional approaches focus on individual abilities and skills that tend to be cross-situational while situational approaches typically focus on a particular communication episode or context. However, limiting one's scope to one or the other approach tends to be problematic because the two seem highly interrelated. The construct of communication competence should involve both the relationship between an individual's communication abilities and the context in which interaction occurs (Stohl, 1983).

Along these lines, Pearce and Cronin (1980) argue that competence includes more than just individual-level dimensions and that communication competence cannot be assessed without considering the context of the interaction(s). These authors suggest that communication competence includes the skills of creating and adapting to social situations along with the constraints of the layers of multiple systems in which a person is operating (p. 186). Pearce and Cronin (1980) go further by defining communication competence as the "ability of a person to control the extent to which s/he is enmeshed in a system" (p. 187). Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that while some knowledge, skill, and motivational characteristics are cross-situational, levels and forms of competence can change depending on the situation and an individual's level of involvement in a system.

Recognizing the limitations of past competence research (cf. McCroskey, 1982), a number of interpersonal communication scholars have shifted away from studying the state versus trait, appropriateness versus effectiveness, impression versus judgment characteristics of competence and have begun to focus on the developmental nature of the construct. More specifically, the process by which children and adolescents acquire social and communication knowledge and skills has received research attention (Delia, Kline, & Burleson, 1979). A fundamental premise within this perspective is that an individual's cognitive development increases through social discourse as he/she matures. In particular, it is assumed that higher forms of reasoning are achieved through "social interaction within a given cultural context" (Bearison, 1982, p. 203), and that individuals construct social theories (or belief systems) that

are "constantly manifested in content and structure by the social environment" (Shantz, 1982, p. 169). In addition, older individuals are expected to develop a more complex system of interpersonal constructs (Delia et al., 1979). However, as Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz (1982) note, little attention has been paid to "the structure and genesis of people's natural categories about the social world. We know more about the end results of the categorization than about its initial stages" (p. 34).

Despite a lack of empirical support, theoretical work has focused on the processes by which individuals develop social knowledge structures and skill repertoires. For example, Wentworth (1980) suggests that individuals actively interpret rule systems where, "The particular experiences of the novice's world provide the raw material for the repertoire of activity that will be expressed as a degree of cultural competence" (Wentworth, 1980, p. 106). In addition, Shantz (1982) suggests that such capabilities are developed,

> "by a variety of methods, such actions as observing social behavior of others and self, imitating, communicating to others, being communicated to, abstracting regularities across time and situations, taking the role of other, and experiencing affective relations with others" (p. 169).

In sum, recent conceptualizations of competence suggest that social knowledge structures about people and objects in a given environment are developed through social interaction. While past research has focused on unitary dimensions of competence, recent literature suggests that interpersonal communication competence is a multidimensional construct that may be best understood through examining the process of developing social communicative knowledge and skills. However, as mentioned earlier, research in interpersonal and organizational communication, as reviewed below, lags behind theory and, on the whole, continues to pursue research exploring factors affecting the process or outcome variables.

Organizational Communication Competence

In a recent review of the organizational communication competence literature, Jablin, Cude, House, Lee, and Roth (in press) suggest that communication competence in organizations is often confused with other aspects of communication such as performance and/or communication effectiveness. As a consequence, and consistent with recent trends in the conceptualization of competence in the interpersonal communication literature, they define organizational communication competence as a capability to use resources--strategic communication knowledge and tactical communication skills--to perform the communication requirements of an organizational role. Using this definition, Jablin et al. (1989) review the literature on organizational communication competence as it reflects an

individual's communication capabilities or resources, namely social cognition/symbolic interaction or performance/skill approaches to competence. Along the lines of the Jablin et al. review, literature pertaining to social cognition/symbolic interaction and performance/skills approaches to organizational communication competence are briefly reviewed below.

Social Cognition/Symbolic Interaction Approaches

Social cognition/symbolic interaction approaches to communication competence posit that organizational realities are created and sustained by their members. The underlying assumptions of such organizational realities, generally defined as a system of values, rules, and norms, provide the basis for evaluation of competent communication behavior, as well as other task- and role-related behaviors. In this view, an organization's context (the value structure in which a communication event occurs) cannot be separated from the interaction of its members. It follows that individuals with greater knowledge and understanding of the prevailing organizational paradigm may have more communication resources available for constructing and interpreting messages. Therefore, from a social cognition/symbolic interaction perspective, competence refers to an individual's level of knowledge of an organization's "reality," or the values, rules, and norms which guide organizational behavior.

Research employing a social cognition/symbolic interaction perspective to organizational communication competence has focused on two general areas: 1) individual differences in the ability to interpret organizational "realities," and 2) the processes by which organizational paradigms are created and changed.

Interpreting organizational "realities". Assuming that knowledge of organizational "reality" is a primary determinant of organizational communication competence, researchers have sought to determine the relationship between individual social cognitive abilities, communication-related abilities, and evaluations of communication competence. More specifically, B. Sypher and her colleagues (Sypher, 1984; Sypher & Zorn, 1986; Sypher & Sypher, 1983) have explored constructs such as self-monitoring, perspective-taking, empathy, and persuasive ability as factors constituting communication competence. Their research has also explored the influence of these constructs on "effectiveness" in organizations.

To briefly review the work of Sypher and associates, their findings suggest that abilities associated with monitoring situationally appropriate cues, influencing others, and differentiating among interpersonal constructs are positively correlated with job level and upward mobility in organizations. However, because of the correlational

nature of these studies, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the causal nature of relationships. More frequent promotions (e.g., role transitions) may provide individuals with more opportunities to develop the necessary social cognitive abilities to engage in appropriate organizational behavior. For example, repetition theory suggests that repeated exposure to information in a number of different contexts typically results in improved performance because it raises the level of "learning or interassociation of a growing number of components" (Hintzman, 1976). Moreover, Wentworth (1980) suggests that continual experience with the content of behaviors exposes the "design" of such behavior ("design" is often used to define culture or behavioral sequences, see Geertz, 1974). Thus, it is difficult to assess whether social cognitive abilities lead to more frequent promotions or if multiple role transitions within the organization provide greater opportunity to develop more complex interpretive schemes or designs of an organization's culture.

In addition, Sypher et al.'s use of job level and upward mobility as indicators of organizational effectiveness may also be problematic. Many organizational members view promotions as a sign of success which is not necessarily the same as effectiveness (Luthans, 1988). For example, individuals in higher positions and/or those on the "fast track" may have higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence than those who aspire to higher job levels but are seldom promoted, thus possibly influencing self-reports of competence. Along with the potential influence of hierarchical level on self-perceptions of competence, estimations of what constitutes persuasive ability and communication effectiveness may differ as one moves across levels in an organization. Previous research suggests, for instance, that hierarchical differences in self-perceptions of superiors and subordinates in the amount of actual communication activity (Jablin, 1979). Hierarchical differences in access to task and other relevant information, as well as perceptions of control and flexibility, may also account for the findings reported above. Therefore, the influence of social cognitive abilities on job level and upward mobility is unclear. Although Sypher and Zorn (1986) report using a longitudinal design to study communication-related variables associated with job level and upward mobility, the processes by which individuals acquire or learn about communication during transitions between roles (e.g., transfers, promotions) were not considered.

Organizational paradigms. In contrast to the personal cognitive approach outlined above, other researchers have viewed competence as an individual's abilities to perform within given cultural rules or paradigms. From this viewpoint, levels of competency are based on the equivalence between the complexity and flexibility of an

individual's own intrapersonal system and the interpersonal culture or system. In this conceptualization, complexity is defined as the breadth and degree of communication behaviors required in an environment and possessed by individuals. On the other hand, flexibility refers to either an individual ability to adapt and/or an environmental capability to tolerate various communication behaviors.

Harris and Cronin (1979) define the interpersonal environment as the organizational culture or "master contract" which consists of "unique constructs for identifying the collectivity as well as particular beliefs and goals that define who 'we' are" (p. 13). In particular, they suggest that the "master contract" includes an organizational image and rules which guide communication activity. The image is a self-definition based on loosely shared beliefs and goals; rules are either constitutive (guide interpretations), or regulative (control everyday interaction behaviors).

Consistent with this "paradigm" approach, competence is the ability to operate within and possibly manipulate constitutive (interpretive) rules (i.e., strategic competence) while a similar ability to follow and potentially exploit regulative (behavioral) rules is called tactical competence. Moreover, the level of equivalence between individual communication abilities and system communication requirements lead to varying degrees of competence. For example, when an individual is scarcely able to maintain logical coherence and interpret meaning in a given environment, he/she is viewed as minimally competent. In turn, an individual reaches a level of satisfactory competence when the individual and interpersonal systems have equal levels of complexity and flexibility. An individual achieves the highest level, optimal competence, when he/she has the ability to manipulate the cultural rules for interaction to increase his/her effectiveness (Harris, 1979; Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

This view of competence makes several key assumptions. First, consistent with the tenets of symbolic interactionism, rule systems are hypothesized to be relatively stable, yet continually evolving through the interaction of system members. Second, it presumes that an individual is able to perform at a minimal level if his/her organizational communication abilities (complexity and flexibility) are equivalent to the requirements of the prevailing organizational value, rule, and norm structure; the ability to adapt to organizational paradigm shifts is not considered an element of minimal competence. Third, it is assumed that individuals negotiate meaning and rules for communication with others in the organization (Harris & Cronen, 1979; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Wellmon, 1988).

In an empirical study based on this latter assumption of a "coordinated management of meaning," Harris and Cronin (1979) posited that an organization's "master contract," or set of cultural rules influenced member's strategic

Cronin's (1980) research described earlier, Wellmon seems inconsistent in her treatment of constitutive and regulative rule categories. For example, it is difficult to assess, from Wellmon's list of competence categories, rules related to the assignment of meaning (constitutive) and those which describe behavioral appropriateness (regulative). A more rigid operationalization of communication competence (strategic vs. tactical) and data gathering methods other than a critical incident technique may yield a more parsimonious set of communication competence rules that are generalizable across organizations.

In sum, findings from social cognition/symbolic interaction approaches suggest that cognitive complexity is related to effectiveness (job level and upward mobility), individuals are able to identify a "master contract" or image of communication competence organizations, and communication competence and other types of role competence are interrelated, but differ across roles. However, to date, no one has empirically studied organizational communication competence by integrating these two perspectives. It seems that in order to explore the nature of competence we must begin to look at the relationship between personal social cognitive abilities and the multiple layers of rules which govern organizational behavior.

Along with the weaknesses associated with studying social cognitive abilities and organizational paradigms in isolation of one another, research on social cognition/symbolic interaction is limited by the neglect of the performance or skills dimension of communication competence. The assumption that individuals with superior cognitive communication-related abilities also have a repertoire of skills to enact strategies or respond to situations is problematic. For example, individuals may have adequate knowledge of the organizational paradigm and rule structure but may not have an adequate skill repertoire to demonstrate more than a minimal level of communicatively competent behavior. In addition, the assumption that cognitively complex individuals are able to select various strategies to combine with specific skills needs empirical support. Ignorance of when and how to combine communication knowledge and skills, lack of motivation, mindful/mindless behavioral tendencies, or other factors could affect the manner in which knowledge and skills are used by interactants. For example, some argue that most organizational behavior is routine and centers around scripted behavior (Gioia & Poole, 1984; Langer, 1978, 1979). Thus, organizational members may often engage in "mindless" activity and still appear competent in their role (Ashforth and Fried, 1988).

and tactical communication competence. The authors defined strategic communication competence as coorientation (or the ability to perceive the elements of a communication including self, other, and the environment). On the other hand, tactical competence (e.g. coordination) was referred to as an individual's "ability to organize knowledge of the organization's abstract image and constitutive rules into regulative rules that will be functional guides for cooperative interaction" (Harris & Cronin, 1979). Thus, Harris and Cronen suggested that an organization's set of cultural assumptions partially dictates the members' abilities to assign meaning to events as well as the ability to produce messages that are appropriate for the interpersonal system.

Despite limitations associated with their research, their findings of an implicit agreement among the respondents about their organization's image provides evidence suggesting that organizational members share a set of beliefs and values. Although little evidence was found for the hypothesized influence of this shared organizational image on interpretive and behavioral rules, it is difficult to assess how attributions of others' behaviors are related to one's beliefs. Thus, there may not have been actual discrepancies in members' predictions of constitutive and regulative rules. Consequently, despite the findings of Harris and Cronen (1979), judgments of communication competence may be based, in part, on organizational members' behavior within a shared set of cultural rules.

In addition, Harris and Cronen's inability to find a link between the "master contract" and members' strategic and tactical communication competence may have been due to their sample of academic department members. Members which typically operate in less structured environments, such as academic departments, may have more complex and flexible constitutive and regulative rules making it more difficult to identify and link attributions of behavior directly to cultural assumptions. A similar argument is made by Nicholson and Arnold (1989b) who suggest that a "compression" of structure and culture occurs as the "immediate organization" becomes smaller and interdependency increases. Thus, it seems premature to suggest that organizational members are unable to project what others generally hold as "organizational reality" and/or are unable to predict how other members will act in more structured environments.

In another empirical study, Wellmon (1988) sought to identify a set of communication rules that serve as a general "master contract" across organizations. This research raises interesting questions about the possibility of developing a cross-situational set of general forms of communication knowledge and behaviors that constitute elements of organizational communication competence. However, while Wellmon claims to support Harris and

On the other hand, an individual may attempt to be too rational in linking communication knowledge and skills to achieve interpersonal goals, thus adversely affecting communication performance and subsequent attributions of communication competence. Cantor, et al. (1982), for example, suggest that individuals who process long-term social knowledge into current cognitive activity limit their abilities to engage in other cognitive activities such as scanning environmental input and engaging in actual behavior. In other words, in some situations too much strategic cognitive activity in an effort to maximize interpersonal communication goals may actually lead to less competent communication performance (Berger, Karol, & Jordan, 1989). Since other organizational members, and researchers, often rely on actual behavior or performance to make judgments of competence, conceptualizations of the organizational communication competence construct must include a skills/performance dimension.

Performance/Skills Inventories

Communication performance and skills research, primarily guided by the work of Monge, et al. (1982) and DiSalvo (1980), suggests that organizational communication competence should: 1) "focus on observable communication behaviors and omit or minimalize social and interpersonal factors" (Monge, et al, 1982, p. 507), and 2) not be considered within the situation or context. Along these lines, Jablin et al. (1989) suggest that competence studies which focus on communication performance assume that maximizing interaction goal is the criterion for evaluating communication competence: individuals with greater communication skills are more likely to achieve desired outcomes in a given interaction regardless of situational demands (Cushman & Craig, 1976; Parks, 1985). As a consequence, the thrust of research in this perspective is concerned with developing "an active program of identifying and defining current communication skill and problem areas in organizations" (DiSalvo, 1980, p. 283). In addition, researchers have looked at the communication skills as part of a larger set of managerial skills, and the influence of communication skills on factors such as overall job performance and job satisfaction. Each of these streams of research are reviewed below.

Communication Skills. Several studies have focused on the identification of communication skills which are considered to be most important for organizational members. A majority of studies in this area are concerned with identifying the communication skills which should receive emphasis in academic and institutional training settings. For example, DiSalvo (1980) provides a comprehensive review of studies which identify communication skills that are required if individuals in organizations. His review of 25 studies showed that researchers often relied on self-

reports by managers and that listening and oral communication skills were most frequently listed as a manager's most important communication skills.

In addition to self-reports by managers, some researchers have focused on the communication skills needed for superior/subordinate relationships. Baird, Bradley, and Nightingale (1978) found that listening was the most preferred skill that lower level workers wanted in their supervisors. In contrast, Downs and Conrad (1982) surveyed 700 middle managers to identify the communication skills which they preferred in their subordinates. Results revealed that middle managers identified encoding clear messages, providing feedback, communicating in a timely manner, and communicating in a brief fashion as the four most important skills that subordinates can possess. Downs and Conrad also used critical incident methods to elicit episodes of effective and ineffective subordinate interaction. A majority of the effective critical incidents centered around the communication of challenging information (e.g., giving unwanted information, negative feedback to superiors), and volunteering input.

In an attempt to investigate the differences in communication skills needed in not only superior/subordinate but other types of reporting relationships, Morse and Piland (1981) assessed the communication skills of 368 primary care nurses in four midwestern metro hospitals. Investigating nurse/patient, nurse/nurse, and nurse/doctor relationships, the researchers, using a job analysis procedure, initially identified nine clusters of communication skills including advising, persuading, instructing, routine information exchange, public speaking, small group communication, giving orders, listening, and management of conflict. Subsequently, data from the 256 returned questionnaires were factor analyzed and revealed different multidimensional constructs of overall communication skills required for the different types of relationships. Thus, results showed that the type of communication skills associated with competence vary with the type of relationships (e.g., peers and clients).

Researchers using the same job analysis procedure as Morse and Piland have investigated the communication skill requirements of individuals based on factors other than the type of reporting relationship (e.g., job classification and tenure). For example, DiSalvo, Larsen, and Seilor (1976) identified different sets of communication skills across several types of job classifications (e.g., personnel vs. finance). At the same time, they found results which contradict Morse and Piland. They identified a core set of communication skills (listening, routine information exchange, and advising) as the most important communication skills for <u>all</u> organizational members regardless of the

nature of the reporting relationship. In a separate study, Fitch (1980) surveyed 79 scientists in various fields and identified routine information exchange as the most important communication skill for young scientists.

Thus, the influence of task characteristics (e.g., task type and reporting relationships) on required communication skills remains unclear. While some evidence suggests that communication skills vary depending on the type of relationship and job classification, other research has focused on differences in communication skills among male and female managers.

Consistent with the communication skills/performance perspective, Monge, Backman, Dillard, and Eisenberg (1982) sought to develop a model of organizational communication competence by asking 251 managers in two large firms in the same industry to rate the communication competence of one of their superiors and subordinates. The Monge et al. findings suggest that a finite set of encoding and decoding behaviors may represent organizational communication competence. However, it is difficult to evaluate the validity of their encoding and decoding competency model since it was based solely on others' global evaluations of competence. This study provides no indication of how individuals made evaluations of competence. The general perceptions of organizational communication competence could either be based on the accumulation of observed communication episodes between the subordinate and superior or the respondents' perceptions of the communication requirements of the roles of superior and subordinate. Moreover, the model does not account for changes in the value of communication skills over time. In contrast, Diez' (1984) argues that one must look at temporal changes in skill demands. Along these lines, Diez (1984) suggests that communication competence is "conceptualized as an ongoing skill by which persons respond to new demands and incorporate new capabilities" (p. 61).

In sum, research that focuses on the identification of communication skills in organization roles most frequently cite listening, "verbal communication skills," and routine information exchange as the most important communication skills for organizational members. However, the literature in this area lacks consistency in survey instruments and the way that communication skills are operationalized. For example, in some studies, skills are listed that are not explicitly communication (e.g., decision making/problem solving, organizing, motivation, human relations, power and conflict, and accepting responsibility). Moreover, in some studies, communication skills are detailed such as listening, writing memoranda, etc. while others use overall measures (e.g., oral and written communication). Also, the importance of some skills (e.g., listening) may be overexaggerated due to the heavy

emphasis on managers as respondents in most of the studies. Thus, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about a specific repertoire of communication skills that would constitute organization-wide communication competence.

In addition to identifying communication skills across various roles and gender, researchers have also conceptualized communication competence as part of a larger set of general competencies or skill sets in organizations (e.g., task, technical, etc.). As Wellmon's (1988) category system of communicatively competent behaviors demonstrates, it is difficult to distinguish communication-related behaviors from other types of organizational behavior. In another example, McLennan (1967) showed that when asked about the essential skills and knowledge needed for effective managers, organizational members listed technical knowledge of production techniques as well as verbal and written communication skills, and knowledge of the organization's rules and policies. Hence, research has shown that organizational members often consider communication competence as an inseparable part of a larger cluster of general organizational abilities. Thus, the literature on general managerial competence including aspects of communication is briefly discussed below.

Communication and General Managerial Competence. In the management and organizational behavior literature, communication abilities are typically viewed as one part of overall managerial competence. This perspective differs from those discussed earlier in that it suggests that communication behavior is often embedded within or tied to other forms of organizational behavior (i.e. coordinating, controlling, decisionmaking, planning) (Boyatzis, 1982; Powers, 1987).

Boyatzis' (1982) model of managerial competence epitomizes the research on managerial competence and suggests that competence can be assessed by examining the interrelationships among task demands, organizational demands, and individual abilities. Moreover, the model distinguishes among levels of competence; suggesting that "threshold" competencies are generic capabilities which are essential to performing jobs, but which are not sufficient to cause superior levels of effectiveness. Although no complete consensus exists about the validity of Boyatzis' model (cf. Mangham, 1986), other research provides support for the basic tenets of the model (e.g., Kolb, Lublin, Spoth, & Baker, 1986).

In making attributions about overall managerial effectiveness, some organizational theorists recognize that managers often lack sufficient levels of abilities to satisfy all of their role demands. Thus, additional research focuses on when an organizational member fails to develop the necessary repertoire to function in his/her work role. Some

suggest that organizational members will typically engage in compensating behaviors that emphasize areas of proficiency to mask minimal competence in another area. For example, Argyris (1986) suggests that managers often develop defensive routines or strategies for covering up potentially embarrassing or ineffective action. He says "managers who are skilled communicators may also be good at covering up real problems" (p. 79). Thus, communication abilities can be used to compensate for a lack of technical competence or vice versa.

Similarly, Kolb, Lublin, Spoth, and Baker (1986) provide empirical support for the notion that various organizational roles require different levels and forms of knowledge and skills. Based on experiential learning theory, Kolb et al. developed a model which included four sets of knowledge and skills: 1) affective (dealing with others), 2) behavioral (making decisions and setting goals), 3) symbolic (testing theories and ideas), and 4) perceptual (gathering and organizing information). Competence was defined as an effective and appropriate fit among individual knowledge and skill sets and work environment demands.

The findings of Kolb and colleagues leads one to conclude that organizational communication requirements differ across types of roles. Therefore, we can posit that some learning or adaptation must occur as one makes role transitions both within and across roles. However, Kolb et al.'s research is limited since it focused solely on self-perceptions of the role characteristics by those who had been in the role for some time. Consequently, no evidence was provided on how individuals adapt their communication skills repertoire as they experience changes in their role.

While the Kolb et al. study is limited by its static approach to identifying the requirements of engineering roles, the bulk of research in this approach has focused on the development of managerial skills and abilities to adapt to changes in job demands. In particular, Powers (1987), Prideaux and Ford (1987), Margerison (1985), have developed formal managerial competence training models which include components of managerial behavior similar to Kolb et al.'s scheme. These training models relate to the present study in that communication abilities are embedded within broader types of organizational behaviors. For example, Powers (1987) outlines a managerial behavior cluster, labeled "directing subordinates," comprised of the ability to use influence, provide feedback, and express oneself freely and easily. Moreover, the ability to make "effective oral presentations to others" is categorized as part of leadership behavior and the "use of a person's previously held concepts to explain and interpret situations" is considered part of goal and action management behaviors. Although training models seem useful for teaching individuals appropriate managerial knowledge and skills, such training sessions are typically conducted away from the

actual work environment. Thus, the absence of any contextual consideration often limits the types of knowledge and skills to basic or "threshold" levels.

In sum, the literature on general managerial competence suggests that communication skills are located within a larger set of abilities. This perspective typically recognizes several clusters or skill sets that are moderated by organizational and task demands. In addition, Boyatzis suggests that managers often possess only "threshold" levels of skills which are a necessary but not sufficient condition for exceptional performance or effectiveness. Along these lines, others (e.g., Argyris, 1986; Hayes, 1984) suggest that organizational members will typically engage in compensating behaviors that emphasize areas of proficiency or mask minimal competence in other areas. For example, Argyris (1986) argues that managers often develop defensive routines or strategies for covering up potentially embarrassing or ineffective action. He says "managers who are skilled communicators may also be good at covering up real problems" (p. 79). Thus, communication abilities can be used to compensate for a lack of technical skills or other competencies, or vice versa.

Conclusion

The previous sections show that organizational communication competence has been studied from social cognition/symbolic interaction and performance/skills approaches. From this review, several important conclusions, limitations, and implications can be drawn. First, past studies have considered competence as an unchanging, static phenomenon. This is particularly interesting since researchers generally recognize the components of communication competence to be knowledge, skills, and motivation (which are dynamic and continually changing). Thus, it seems reasonable that if one considers communication competence to be a dynamic, changing construct of individual capabilities in a given situation, it is necessary to look at the development of knowledge, skills, and motivation. In other words, the process by which individuals come to know the appropriate communication knowledge and skills necessary to fill a particular role and subsequently adapt to those requirements may explain why some individuals develop a greater capacity for effectiveness (Sypher et al), rule manipulation (Harris & Cronin, 1979), or flexibility than others.

Second, past competence research has provided little information about the multiple ways in which individuals acquire communication knowledge and skills. Research by Papa (1989), Clark et al. (1985), and others showed that formal communication training can be used for developing communication abilities, but DeWine (1987) suggested the

effectiveness of such training is limited by individuals' perceptions of practical value and ability to perform the skills. Moreover, McLennan (1967) showed that managers overwhelmingly rated informal training as the most important source for information concerning managerial knowledge and skills. Thus, while organizational members learn and develop strategic knowledge and tactical skills through a variety of ways, the less formal types of learning may be the most effective, however informal learning processes have been an infrequent object of study.

Another issue centers around the degree to which organizational members share some similar cultural assumptions. If a common set of values, norms, and rules of behavior exist in an organization, then members' judgments of competence may be based on similar criteria. However, the latter claim has not been empirically supported. Moreover, the "reality" that organizational members share about organizational values, norms, and rules, may be influenced, in part, by a "master contract," but more specific cultural assumptions are often formed at the subunit level (e.g., Falcione, Sussman, & Herden, 1987). In addition, role negotiation processes are likely to change or alter the organizational "reality" for the members of a role set. Thus, in order to investigate an individual's strategic communication knowledge, the influence of cultural assumptions of the immediate work group on judgments about levels of competence and how role negotiation processes cause a set of values, norms, and rules of behavior to change should be studied.

A fourth conclusion from the preceding review is that a fairly finite set of encoding and decoding skills are important in organizations. Although the operational definitions of communication skills were not always consistent among studies, results suggest that organizational members perceive a core set of skills as vital for effectiveness. Hence, it appears that a parsimonious model of the communication skill requirements in organizations can be developed (e.g., Monge et al. 1982). It is also apparent from the research reviewed that role, task, and individual characteristics influence the communication skills that are identified as important. While seeming to contradict the argument for identifying a core set of skills, these two positions may actually be compatible. In short, a basic set of communication skills can probably be identified, yet the significance of those skills is typically determined by organizational and task demands as well as individual abilities to perform them. Finally, evidence suggests that individual cognitive abilities are correlated with "success" in organizations. Despite questions about the directionality of the relationship between cognitive abilities and upward mobility and job level, it seems reasonable to conclude that both processes operate simultaneously; organizational members with more social cognitive abilities are

more likely to be promoted and those who are promoted more frequently have a greater opportunity to develop more complex interpretive schemes of an organization's culture. Thus, it seems that in order to study how individuals become communicatively competent in organizations, both individual cognitive abilities and the processes associated with role transitions must be considered.

Organizational Assimilation

The processes by which individuals investigate, join, and become organizational "insiders" are often referred to as organizational assimilation. During the initial period of membership, organizational newcomers and incumbents experience change and adaption. In particular, newcomers adapt to the values, rules, and norms of the organization as well as learn task-related skills. At the same time, newcomers individualize, or negotiate, their new role causing changes in the existing work group (Nicholson & Arnold, 1989a). As newcomers become integrated into an organization, Jones (1983b) suggests that they not only learn, but internalize the norms and values of the culture. Moreover, as Louis, Posner, & Powell (1983) argue, "Newcomers must assimilate the unofficial rules for sorting, labeling, and interpreting experience in the organization. These unwritten rules provide important clues for how to become an effective organizational member" (p. 858). Thus, assimilation can be characterized as the process by which an individual's self-image and identity and the values of the work group and organization are aligned (Fisher, 1986).

Organizational socialization is also concerned with the initial period of organizational membership. However, research in this area, in contrast to organizational assimilation, has a somewhat different focus. While assimilation processes focus on the adaption and/or change processes that occur as newcomers first enter organizations, socialization is more concerned with how organizations attempt to teach newcomers necessary work skills and abilities, appropriate role behaviors, group norms, and organizational values (Feldman, 1980). In addition, socialization stresses the formal processes of integrating organizational newcomers (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Despite the conceptual differences between assimilation and socialization, these literatures can be integrated by viewing socialization as part of the overall assimilation process. Thus, the assimilation model captures the process as newcomers enter organizations from both the individual and organizational perspectives.

Researchers have examined the dual nature of organizational entry processes from a variety of viewpoints. In general, Inkeles (1968) argues that "One focus is on the input side, on the process of acquisition....the other element

stresses the results of the processes, or output side..." (p. 77, author's emphasis). Moreover, Reichers (1987), summarizing the various approaches to organizational socialization research, concludes that researchers have generally focused on situational factors (e.g., group norms and job characteristics) and long-term outcomes (e.g., commitment and satisfaction). More specifically, the assimilation perspective is concerned with: (a) the nature of interaction among newcomers and incumbents, and (b) characteristics and outcomes of the phases of assimilation (Fisher, 1986; Jablin, 1982; Louis, 1980).

The assimilation perspective is based on the theoretical foundations of symbolic interactionism, role theory, social learning theory, and social exchange theory. Briefly, symbolic interactionism deals with the processes by which individuals develop social identities and how "realities" are constructed based on interactions with others. Consistent with symbolic interactionism, role theorists suggest that society and the roles within it are a web of interaction. Consequently, an individual's "position," relative to others, is defined through interaction. Social learning theory posits that individuals form perceptions of self-efficacy and success in handling new situations based on past experiences and feedback from others in the role set (Jones, 1983a; Bandura, 1977, 1978). Finally, social exchange theory, as applied to the assimilation process, focuses on how individuals weigh the costs and benefits of developing (and dissolving) interpersonal relationships. In short, these theoretical bases concentrate on how individuals "locate" themselves in a social milieu, and how the individuals construct a social "reality."

From these theoretical underpinnings, several models have been developed which map the phases of assimilation. Most models refer to anticipatory socialization as the first phase (Feldman, 1980; Jablin, 1987; Louis, 1980), defining this as the period where newcomers acquire information prior to entry that prepares them to occupy organizational roles (Van Maanen, 1975). It is assumed that individuals who possess more complete and accurate a priori knowledge of role-related information will be assimilated into the organization more easily and require less time to adjust (Fisher, 1986). Jablin (1987) suggests that individuals typically receive role-related information from organizational literature or interpersonal interactions with individuals who possess specific or general knowledge about the company and/or position (e.g., employment interviewers and/or job incumbents). In sum, during the anticipatory socialization phase, newcomers develop expectations about the organization and position based on interactions with organizational and interpersonal sources prior to entering the organization (Jablin, 1987).

The second phase, encounter or accommodation, includes the initial breaking in period where newcomers confirm or disconfirm expectations, experience role ambiguity and conflict, discover feedback and support mechanisms, and compare self and organizational evaluations of performance (Feldman, 1976; Fisher, 1986). In other words, this phase is where newcomers "attribute meaning to unexpected events by reformulating existing work-related cognitive scripts and attributional models" (Jablin, 1987, p. 695). Some consider encounter to be the most crucial period for effective socialization since it represents the first exposure to others' behavioral expectations, and the norms, values, and attitudes of the work group and organization (Van Maanen, 1975). In addition, Louis (1980) suggests that the encounter phase is critical in shaping a newcomer's long-term orientation to the organization.

Metamorphosis or role management is the third phase in the socialization process. This includes a "settling in" process and role negotiation occurs as a newcomer gains the status of a full-fledged member of an organization. Feldman (1976) suggests that, during this phase, two types of conflicts are typically resolved: 1) how the work in the new organization fits in with a newcomer's other life interests; and, 2) how the newcomer resolves conflicts among others employees in the organization.

Although assimilation is typically conceptualized as a process involving a number of phases and passages (Buchanan, 1974; Feldman, 1976; Schein, 1979; Van Maanen, 1975; Wanous, 1980), few studies have explored the sequencing of the stages or phases of the process. In part, this is due to a lack of longitudinal research in the area, which seems necessary to understand the process of assimilation. As Louis (1980) argues,

> In general, the processes by which recruits come to appreciate pivotal organizational values, role-related abilities and missions, and interpretation schemes have not been adequately explored in the literature on organizational socialization (p. 233).

Consistent with this argument, Nicholson (1984) suggests that "Most satisfactory would be longitudinal designs that allow personal change to be traced, through repeated measures on standardized instruments, from before to after the [work role] transition" (p. 179). Along these lines, some studies have begun to explore the assimilation process using repeated measures designs (e.g., Graen, Orris & Johnson, 1973; Jablin, 1984; Nicholson & Arnold, 1989a, 1989b).

In conclusion, aside from the studies listed above, research concerned with the process of organizational assimilation has largely been fragmented and nonempirical (Fisher, 1986; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Van Maanen, 1975). In addition, much of the socialization research assumes that a newcomer initially experiences "reality shock" upon organizational entry and is a passive actor in the socialization process (Jones, 1983a). At the same time,

however, other studies have shown that both newcomers and incumbents experience changes in expectations, behaviors, and affective reactions during the encounter period. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that newcomers' communication knowledge and skill repertoires change and/or are adjusted during the assimilation process.

Finally, it is also important to note that with the exception of socialization tactic research (Van Maanen & Schein, 1976), most studies on assimilation focus on intra- and interpersonal levels of analysis dealing with the development of relations among newcomers, their supervisors and immediate co-workers. However, scholars have suggested that influences at the group, organizational, and societal levels need to be considered in order to assess the true nature of the assimilation process (Jablin & Krone, 1987). Therefore, it seems that we need to consider how newcomers' communication knowledge and skills are influenced by socializing agents at multiple levels in an organization.

Organizational Communication Competence and Assimilation

With the exception of Jablin (1987), and O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987), little attention has been directed at how assimilation processes in organizations influence levels of communication competence. For example, Jablin (1987) suggests that communication competence is a dynamic outcome of the assimilation process, and O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) argue that competence can be conceptualized as an input, moderating factor, or outcome during assimilation. In addition, O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) note that by examining the facets of communication competence, "more cohesive communication-based models and theories of socialization" may be developed (p. 438). Thus, by looking at the development of communication competence during assimilation, we may begin to answer questions about changes in the communication knowledge and skills of newcomers as they enter organizations. This initial model focuses on the first two phases, anticipatory socialization and encounter, of the assimilation process. The limitations of neglecting the final metamorphosis phase are minimized since researchers suggest that experiences during the first phases often "set the course" for newcomers' assimilation into organizations (Feldman, 1983).

Communication competence during anticipatory socialization.

Communication competence during anticipatory socialization can be conceptualized in terms of newcomers' and organizational members' expectations of the levels of communication skills and knowledge needed for the newcomers' organizational roles (See Figure 1). As mentioned earlier, newcomers typically develop their expectations of the communication requirements of the organization and/or position through: 1) interaction with

individuals (e.g., employment interviewers and job incumbents) which convey information about the organization and/or position (Jablin, 1987); and 2) interpretive schemes and behavioral scripts from previous work experience and occupational socialization. At the same time, organizational incumbents have expectations of: 1) the communication requirements necessary to fill the newcomer's role; and, 2) how the role "fits" with other positions in the organization.

As noted earlier, types of reporting relationships and other role-related characteristics (e.g., job classification and tenure) have been shown to influence the communication skills that are associated with organizational members' competence (DiSalvo, et al., 1976). Moreover, some have suggested that accurate expectations of an organization's work environment (e.g., culture) also affects newcomers' subsequent performance (Louis, 1990; Gomersall & Myers, 1966). Thus, during the anticipatory socialization phase, it seems reasonable to explore how the match among newcomers' and organizational incumbents' expectations of the communication skill and knowledge requirements of newcomers' roles influences the newcomers' subsequent levels of communication competence. Also, regarding an individual's communication skill development, it was shown earlier that organizational members' perceptions of their ability to perform required skills influenced their adoption of new communication skills learned in training sessions (DeWine, 1987). It seems that a similar effect could occur as newcomers learn and adopt the communication skills in their new role.

Other studies (e.g., Wellmon, 1988) indicated that it is often difficult for individuals to distinguish between communication competence and other types of competence (e.g., managerial). As a consequence, it seems reasonable to expect that during anticipatory socialization, newcomers' perceptions of their other competencies (e.g., task, technical) might be associated with communication competence. For example, a halo effect, based on the lack of incumbents' exposure to newcomers in a variety of contexts, may be projected to newcomers' communication abilities from other types of task competencies during the initial "honeymoon" period.

Several factors concerning how individuals process information were also shown to influence the communication knowledge, skills, and motivation of organizational members. As discussed earlier, an individual's social cognitive abilities (e.g., cognitive differentiation, self monitoring, and perspective taking), appear to influence his/her level of "success" in the organization. Thus, it seems likely that these same social cognitive abilities may influence a newcomer's level of communication knowledge about the organization and/or position prior to entering

the organization. As both researchers and practitioners involved in organizational selection processes have suggested, an applicant's ability to succeed in an organization is likely related to his/her ability to recognize whether or not a match exists between his/her own attributes, needs, etc. and the organization's strategies, culture, norms, and values (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). However, the relationship between social cognitive abilities and an applicant's communication knowledge prior to entering organizations has yet to receive research attention.

Regarding the motivation componenent during anticipatory socialization, previous literature suggests that the motivation to be competent comes from an individual's innate drive to master the environment (White, 1959), and/or perceived rewards or gains for demonstrating competent behavior (Beck, 1983). Consistent with the latter, a newcomer may anticipate rewards from demonstrating competence in a role (O'Keefe and Reid-Nash, 1987), and be motivated to be competent based on the importance that he/she attaches to "successful" or "effective" role performance. Along these lines, we could expect, for instance, that newcomers who perceive the position as directly relevant to their career goals will be more motivated to use or develop appropriate levels of communication knowledge and skills. In contrast, newcomers who consider a position as temporary or insignificant for their career may be less inspired to demonstrate or develop communication competence.

In sum, with respect to communication competence, the anticipatory socialization phase is concerned with newcomers' and organizational members' expectations of the communication requirements of roles within the organization. Factors during this pre-entry phase which may influence newcomers' subsequent levels of competence include newcomers'; 1) role-related expectations, 2) individual characteristics and abilities, and 3) motivation. Consistent with the developmental perspective, the next section outlines a separate, yet related model of how these factors and others influence communication competence after newcomers enter the organization and begin making sense of their roles and organizations.

Communication competence during organizational encounter.

In earlier discussion, the encounter phase was defined as the initial "breaking in" period where a newcomer confirms or disconfirms expectations that were formed during anticipatory socialization. In general, newcomers engage in sensemaking activities during the encounter phase as they develop new behaviors or adjust existing ones, and attach meaning to role-related activities (Louis, 1980). Moreover, as newcomers learn more about their roles, they typically experience role ambiguity and conflict, discover feedback and support mechanisms, and compare self

and organizational evaluations of performance (Feldman, 1976; Fisher, 1986). As a consequence, newcomers initially engage in an intensive period of learning and adapting to self and others' expectations.

Since a newcomer's communication competence during encounter includes developing the necessary communication knowledge and skills in his/her role, similarities appear to exist between communication competence and other developmental models of competence in organizations. For example, Lang and Dittrich (1982) propose a developmental model for achieving managerial competence which posits that an individual progresses through three levels of learning. Briefly, Lang and Dittrich (1982) suggest that individuals become competent by first developing basic skills (e.g., information gathering, etc.). Individuals progress to higher levels of competency as they develop the ability to integrate disparate pieces of information, and then evaluate decision problems as they relate to more complex environments. In addition, Lang and Dittrich argue that individuals cannot become competent to act in more complex environments unless they have achieved some level of competence in lower levels including basic managerial skills. In short, the authors suggest that competence is a hierarchical process of basic skill building, integrating information, and evaluating action.

The development of communication competence during the assimilation process may develop in a similar manner. Communication competence begins by individuals' first developing basic (or threshold, see Boyatzis, 1982) communication skills that are necessary to function in their roles and organizations. However, since (a) previous research suggests that the basic skill requirements for most organizational roles are relatively consistent across roles and stable over time (DiSalvo, 1980), and (b) organizational and self selection processes often ensure that most newcomers already possess at least the basic or threshold communication skills needed to function in organizational roles, newcomers may not necessarily need to develop new skills to become competent, but rather learn which skills to emphasize given contextual norms. In short, the knowledge rather than the skill component of communication competence may be more influential in determining a newcomer's level of communication competence (Jablin, et. al, in press).

As earlier defined, the communication knowledge component of competence involves a newcomer's capability to: 1) interpret informational cues about communication norms, and 2) combine this knowledge with skills to perform in role-related interaction. In other words, as Louis (1980) suggests, "Newcomers need situation-specific or culture-specific interpretation schemes in order to make sense of happenings in the setting and to respond with meaningful

and appropriate actions" (p. 233). Therefore, it seems that a newcomer's communication competence during encounter centers around his/her ability to form appropriate combinations of organizational communication knowledge and skills in order to achieve desired outcomes (e.g., effectiveness, satisfaction, etc.).

As newcomers develop interpretive schemes and behavioral scripts to engage in role-related activities, several factors influence how they develop their communication knowledge and skills (see Figure 2). In particular, the model suggests that an individual's social cognitive abilities, role set factors, and organizational/task factors are associated with a newcomer's communication competence. In addition, as shown in the model, competency resources (e.g., knowledge and skills) are considered antecedents to newcomer communication behaviors. In turn, outcomes associated with these behaviors, both direct and mediated through the role set and organizational/task factors, provide newcomers with feedback about their communication activities (e.g., effectiveness, satisfaction, shared understanding) which may influence further development of newcomers' communication competence. In the following sections, the components of the competence model during the encounter phase are outlined.

Individual abilities. During the encounter phase, the processes by which a newcomer senses and interprets informational cues to develop new cognitive schemes and revise existing ones may affect his/her communication competence not only during the entry phase but also in later phases of assimilation. For example, it seems reasonable that a newcomer who has advanced cognitive abilities may develop more elaborate and complex schemes which enhance his/her communication competence resources (e.g., role-relevant task and social information) (Sypher, 1984; Morse, 1975). Thus, social cognitive skills not only appear to influence communication knowledge prior to organizational entry, but also affect the ability of individuals to develop new cognitive schemes during the encounter phase. For example, Morse (1975) and Schroeder, Driver, and Streufert (1967) suggest that levels of cognitive complexity are positively related to levels of information processing as individuals enter uncertain environments.

Interaction with role set. Often serving as a newcomer's primary socialization agents, members of a newcomer's role set communicate attitudinal and behavioral expectations to the newcomer, and provide feedback about his/her performance (Katz, 1980). As a consequence, information about role-related communication expectations and feedback about a newcomer's communication performance may influence a newcomer's communication abilities. Scant research attention, however, has been paid to the frequency with which newcomers interact with different information sources and the development of their communication knowledge and skills.

Moreover, the extent to which newcomers find some information sources more valuable that others in providing information about role-related communication expectations has been an infrequent object of research attention (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1985).

Consistent with the notion that newcomers are active rather than passive actors during assimilation, the encounter phase of the assimilation process can be characterized as an information sharing process designed to reduce uncertainty for organizational newcomers and incumbents (Graen, et al., 1973; Miller, 1989). As Louis (1980) argues, "socialization practices that facilitate sense making and, in the process, encourage appreciation of the local culture and acquisition of a setting-specific interpretation scheme ultimately facilitate adaption to the new setting and progress through the stages of socialization" (p. 245). Thus, it seems useful to assess how newcomers' communication competence is influenced by their information gathering tactics.

With respect to information gathering behaviors, Miller & Jablin (1991) argue that newcomers' levels of uncertainty serve as an impetus for them to seek information. In turn, Miller (1989) reports data indicating that certain information seeking tactics are more effective in reducing newcomers' levels of role ambiguity and conflict. Extrapolating from this research, it seems likely that relationships exist among newcomers' communication knowledge, repertoire of communication skills, levels of motivation, and their information gathering activities.

While a newcomer's ability to engage in more elaborate information gathering activities may result in more information, this information may not necessarily result in more valuable information to develop interpretive schemes and behavioral scripts. As Louis (1980) suggests, "the newcomer's senses are simultaneously inundated with many unfamiliar cues. It may not be clear to the newcomer just what constitutes a cue, let alone what the cues refer to, which cues require response, or how to interpret or select responses to them" (p. 230). While previous research provides a comprehensive typology of information gathering behaviors (Miller & Jablin, 1991), we know little about how the results of the newcomers' information gathering activities are associated with the development of their knowledge of organizational communication norms.

As noted earlier, Lang and Dittrich suggest that competence is achieved through an incremental process beginning with basic skills and progressing through the development of the ability to function in more complex environments. Although these authors are concerned with individual development, it seems reasonable to suggest that relational development among a newcomer and his/her role set may occur along a similar path. In other words, as a

newcomer begins to interpret messages and interact with others in more meaningful ways, he/she may desire different types of information as he/she develops more elaborate interpretive schemes. At the same time, organizational members may change the content of their messages to newcomers since they may assume (or expect) newcomers to have the ability to interpret more complex forms of communication.

Organizational influences. Although members of a newcomer's role set typically function as his/her primary socialization agents, socialization influences at other levels of analysis may affect his/her adjustment process (Jablin & Krone, 1987). As Jones (1986) argues, "it is necessary to investigate how both individual and organizational factors combine to influence (1) newcomers' subsequent adjustments to organizations and (2) their role behaviors" (p. 262). In particular, the influence of organizational socialization tactics (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) may have a large impact on newcomers' learning and adjustment. Employing a modified version of Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) typology of organizational socialization tactics, Jones (1986) found that various socialization tactics influence how individuals perform their roles and adjust to task requirements. Moreover, his findings also revealed that newcomers' levels of self-efficacy moderate the relationship between socialization tactics and newcomers' role performance.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to draw on the communication competence and organizational assimilation literatures to propose models of the process of developing organizational communication competence. This review suggests that the construct of organizational communication competence must be viewed as multidimensional and dynamic. Hence, the proposed models focus on the development of organizational communication competence rather than assuming that all organizational members naturally possess appropriate levels of communication knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in effective workplace interaction.

As noted earlier, theoretical work has started to address the dynamic nature of communication competence yet empirical work lags behind. In order to study organizational communication competence as a developmental process, designs will require a longitudinal perspective and, as the models indicate, allow for the changes in the influence of multiple variables at different stages in the assinmilation process.

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